

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. said today that the Republican Medicare bill that narrowly passed the House 216-215 (with one voting present) is "too little, too complicated, and too close to privatization. The centerpiece of the bill is a prescription drug benefit, which Democrats have championed for years. Today the Republicans showed that they'll follow our lead on important issues, but they won't go as far to maintain the health of seniors as they will to maintain the wealth of millionaires."

Jackson also said, "The so-called Prescription Drug and Medicare Modernization Act is a mess. First, it falls far short of its goal of offering an affordable prescription drug benefit under Medicare. For example, there are too few protections for low-income seniors, and no concern for those barely above Medicare eligibility. There is also a significant gap in coverage—NONE for drug costs between \$2,000 and \$5,100 or higher depending upon income. Republican leaders say the plan would cost too much without that gap. Trimming the tax cut they just gave the wealthiest Americans could have helped cover the cost. This bill also misses a rare opportunity to use Medicare's size and clout to lower drug prices, something seniors' organizations have been requesting.

"Second, we'll need special Medicare classes just to figure out how to use the plan! There is an estimated monthly premium of \$35, then you spend the \$250 annual deductible. After that you pay 20% of up to \$2,000 in drug costs. Then there's that gap I mentioned, which affects almost half of Medicare beneficiaries. After that the plan kicks back in on some level.

"Third, this legislation undermines Medicare's uniform, guaranteed benefits. That estimated monthly premium of \$35 could change at any time, in any part of the nation, based on the use of traditional Medicare or a private insurance company. This privatization of Medicare could force those covered by private insurers back into choosing between medicine and shelter or food, and could eventually destabilize traditional Medicare by driving costs beyond the means of the poorest beneficiaries. The privatization scheme also relies on nonexistent—therefore untried and untested—drug-only plans. That means we would be using some of our most vulnerable citizens as guinea pigs.

"This bill is another of the Republicans' carefully-crafted cuts in the social safety net. If we allow this to continue, much of what we have long held dear may fall into the gutter," said Jackson.